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ABSTRACT

Challenges to the psychology teacher are considered, including engaging students in the learning process, helping students develop a historical perspective in their study of psychology, and dealing with controversial topics. Resistance to answering questions is likely to be greatest when the lecturer asks for highly specific facts. Students may be more likely to respond when questions are presented as hypotheses, or open-ended interpretations that demand reflective thinking. Challenging students' passivity can not only stimulate productive thinking but also can help improve their oral communication. To foster these kinds of activities, the teacher must possess a high degree of motivation. Classroom presentations should be well organized and teachers should have good elocutionary skills. If discussion is dominated by the teacher in small classes, student passivity can be as great as that in large lecture classes. Courage on the teacher's part is needed to deal with controversial and sensitive ideas in the classroom. Teachers cannot deal with topics such as homosexuality and sex differences in abilities without risking conflict with some students' moral, ethical, religious, or political beliefs. Finally, integrating historical views for all topics in psychology courses is advocated. (SW)

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COURAGE IN THE CLASSROOM[1]

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In the preface to his book Fear and Courage, Professor Stanley Rachman (1978) stated that his search of Psychological Abstracts yielded much more information on fear than on courage. Rachman concluded that perhaps psychologists have become so concerned with fear that we have neglected to notice that courage may occur more frequently than we think. By including courage as a central topic in his book, he hoped to present a more rounded and optimistic view of human qualities. It is in that spirit I speak today of courage in the classroom.

There are, of course, various types of courage. What I wish to talk about is that quality of mind and action that enables the teacher of psychology to meet problems and issues in the classroom with firmness, persistence and conviction. And it is more than that. I mean not only confronting these problems and issues as they arise, but initiating them, even in the face of student resistance and other difficulties. Such courage can be a central force in the achievement of educational goals. I take it that one of these goals, especially

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in the context of "liberal education," is the training of the intellect, to use an old-fashioned phrase. This is truly a demanding task. Freud (1927/1964) once said, in comparing the role of the ego with that of the id; "The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing" (p. 87). What can we do in the classroom to help the intellect gain that hearing?

One of the most difficult tasks is to challenge students' passivity-to actively engage them in the learning process. In doing this the problem lies not only with our students but with us as well. Student passivity may often suit our own inclinations. Consider, for example, one of the most common methods of teaching--the lecture. When students passively allow us to lecture throughout the class session with few if any questions or comments, we may feel pleased that our representation was so clear that interruptions were unnecessary. Now in some instances this might be quite true. But all too frequently we may actually discourage such responses so as not to interfere with our well organized sequence and timing. In that way we can proceed right on schedule, conveying information in complete safety. We need not be blatant in doing this. Emphasizing factual knowledge almost entirely, making dogmatic interpretations that permit no alternative explanations; projecting an abstract and detached air; ignoring unspoken but obvious signs of disagreement or puzzlement -- these will do very nicely. Of course, we can reserve the last five minutes or so of the session for students' questions and comments, but

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that device is almost certain to produce little if any productive thinking.

Although it may seem paradoxical, resistance to answering questions is apt to be greatest when the lecturer asks for highly specific facts. That is understandable, since the possibility of giving an obviously "wrong" answer in public naturally tends to inhibit many students. Even when they know the "right" answer, some students resist speaking up because the whole procedure reminds them of the rote recitation they disliked in earlier educational experiences. As a lecturer, I have found that students are more likely to respond when questions are presented as hypotheses, or open-ended interpretations which demand reflective thinking. For example, one can use such leading phrases as "I wonder why," "What could be another way of looking at that," and so forth.

Failure to engage students in our classroom pre tations can be strengthened by the familiar fact that the questions and comments we intersperse during a lecture may draw only silence. Admittedly, such silence is difficult to handle. Even 15 seconds of waiting for a response can seem like a very long time, and 30 seconds can become very uncomfortable. It is tempting, then, for the teacher to succumb to the tension and answer the query. Of course, doing that consistently will only reinforce silence, as students learn that the questions the teacher asks will certainly be answered --by the teacher. The teacher can then use the silence to justify decreasing attempts to elicit student response.

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But it doesn't have to be that way. Given the motivation, the teacher can wait out the silence. For example, I have found that there are always a few students who will eventually respond if I wait long enough. They too need to reduce tension. One can help break the silence by rephrasing questions, and by indicating that one can understand why there was no response. Of course, it also helps if the questions are sufficiently challenging to deserve a response. Gradually, as students learn they are expected to respond, and if the challenges are provocative enough, an increasing number will respond. Of course, one must be then be prepared to handle those responses, for they too may well be provocative.

In thus challenging students' passivity, we can not only stimulate productive thinking, but also help improve their oral communication. Positive reinforcement for their efforts and modeling effective ways of expressing thoughts can greatly facilitate that learning. Encouraging students to engage in meaningful discourse can motivate them to continue practicing their ideas and expressing them to others. And there are direct benefits to the teacher, for we can use students' reactions to see if we are on target, and to stimulate and improve our presentations.

Obviously, to foster these kinds of activities the teacher must possess a high degree of motivation. And certainly there is an art to doing it well. But it is a skill that many teachers can master, provided they are sufficiently convinced of its pedagogical value, and are bold enough. Surely the risk is worth taking if one truly believes

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that a central goal of education is to reinforce in students the desire to continue learning and to seek new avenues of knowledge - indeed, above all, to value the importance of intellectual inquiry.

There is a problem of student resistance that in a sense is the teacher's personal problem. One must accept the unpleasant fact that there will always be some students who will not like what I have suggested, and will let their displeasure be known in one way or another. To maintain one's pedagogical position requires a strong belief in one's own educational values. The problem can be compounded for teachers who want all their students to like everything that goes on in the classroom, and feel deeply that all students must like how the course is being taught. Thus, students' rejection of certain methods of teaching may be perceived as a personal defeat. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn here with psychotherapy. Karen Horney has pointed out that some therapists become irritated when a patient fails to progress in spite of all their skill and efforts. This irritation, she proposed, arises because the therapist has the "grandiose" idea of curing every patient, regardless of the problem, and therefore feels it a personal humiliation when therapy does not succeed (Costin, 1976, p. 148).

I realize that under certain circumstances, such as an extremely large class, poor acoustics, unfavorable seating arrangements, or other negative factors, it simply may not be feasible to engage students in the manner I have suggested. Nevertheless, one can still increase the possibility of involving them in productive ways. Let me begin with some rather elementary matters. We would all agree, I am

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sure, that classroom presentations should be well organized. Many experienced lecturers also emphasize the importance of elocutionary skills. As one teacher has suggested in writing on the art of lecturing:

> Look directly at this one and that one ...
> After going to the effort to establish rapport
> the (lecturer) should not leave the class by gazing
> off into space. By the device of direct attentiveness
> to (students), the teacher can be more sensitive to
> (their) reactions and thus be ready to modify tactics
> when...interest (seems to fall). (Fisher, 1957, p. 16).

Now that is not bad advice. But are such techniques sufficient in themselves to truly involve students intellectually and emotionally? Or can more be done? Or, indeed, if what we are saying is powerful enough and challenging enough, can we successfully arouse our students without necessarily possessing finely honed speaking skills? Consider, for example, philosopher Irwin Edman's memories of his days as an undergraduate, listening to John Dewey lecture:

> He had none of the usual tricks or gifts of
> the effective lecturer...He seemed to be saying
> whatever came into his head next, and at one
> o'clock on an autumn afternoon to at least
> one undergraduate what came next did not
> always seem to have a very clear connection
> with what had just gone before...But I soon

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> found that it was my mind that had wandered, not John Dewey's. I began very soon to do what I had seldom done in college courses--to take notes. It was then a remarkable discovery to make on looking over my notes to find that what had seemes do casual, so rambling, so unexciting, was of an extra-ordinary coherence, texture, and brilliance. ...I had been listening to a [lecturer] actually thinking in the presence of a class. As one became accustomed to Dewey's technique, it was this last aspect of his teaching that was most impressive--and educative. To attend a lecture of John Dewey was to participate in the actual business of thought." (Peterson, 1946, pp. 196-197).

Did Professor Dewey actually think his way through every problem from beginning to end every time he lectured? It is doubtful. More likely, what he was trying to do was make his listeners feel that he had thought his way through all those problems, and was now reporting the intellectual process step by step, and its results. It was this intellectual honesty that Dewey's students admired the most--his willingness to share his thinking with them as he described the steps he had taken in solving problems--steps that were sometimes tortuous, tentative, and even wrong (Highet, 1950, pp. 211-212).

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One need not copy Dewey's particular style to accomplish what he did. However, regardless of how one goes about it, a lecture can be so designed as to stimulate students to trace one's thoughts and problem solving behavior.

So far I have been talking about situations where lecturing in one form or another is appropriate. But what about small classes where discussion is expected to prevail, and indeed is advertised as such? Unfortunately, what goes on may not always live up to the advertisement, even in very small groups. As the educator Jacques Barzun (1945) put it: "Many teachers think that because they sit around a table with only a dozen students they are running a discussion group, but they are lecturing just the same if the stream of discourse flows in one one direction" (p. 37). Where discussion is dominated by the teacher--obviously or subtly--or so directed that students fear the consequences of disagreement and free expression--then student passivity can be just as great as what may appear in large lecture classes. It just becomes more concealed. This can occur not only in undergraduate groups but in graduate classes as well. Indeed, concealed passivity--which may appear as conformity--can be even greater for graduate students, since the stakes are higher.

Perhaps one of the greatest threats to constructive discussion is the fear that one will be wrong, or that one's argument is weak. For the student this may take the form of passive participation, in which only "safe" ideas are advanced. For the teacher, the fear is often

revealed by the necessity to be always in firm control, so directing the discussion that a clash of ideas is minimized. But if the teacher is willing to encourage the sharing and true exchange of ideas, and convey that conviction to the students, then the opportunity for discussion that stimulates creative thinking and learning is greatly enhanced and threat diminished.

In the last year of his life, Pavlov (1936) made a bequest to the Academic Youth of Soviet Russia which I think is highly relevant to this matter of intellectual honesty--relevant for students and teachers alike. "What can I wish," asked Pavlov, "to the youth of my country who devote themselves to science?" After admonishing them to learn the ABC of science before "ascending the summit," Pavlow turned to his bequest of modesty. "Never think," he said, "that you already know all. However highly you are appraised, always have the courage to say to yourself -- I am ignorant."

Let us now consider another crucial challenge to classroom behavior -- helping students develop a historical perspective in their study of psychology. This is far from an easy task. As I suspect we all know, many students today, undergraduates and graduates alike, too often seem to lack an appreciation and understanding of relationships between past and present knowledge. Indeed, we may well be faced with what Christopher Lasch (1979) has described as a dominant theme in American life today: the culture of narcissism. "To live for the moment," says Lasch, "is the prevailing passion...We are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a

succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future" (p. 30). If Lasch is right -- and he presents compelling evidence to support his view -- what can we do to help counter this tide of historical narcissism?

To begin with, we would do well to be guided by the words of that great Roman statesman and orator, Marcus Cicero (46 B.C.), who declared: "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child." Armed with that conviction, we then need to include, systematically and persistently, a historical perspective in the psychology we teach. I do not mean simply devoting a few opening sessions to a history of the subject. Nor am I talking about specific courses in the history of psychology, valuable as they can be. What I have in mind is a kind of "consciousness raising"--a persistent integration of historical views within all the particular topics in every psychology course we teach. In that way students could begin to see that concepts, principles, and theories of psychology are not simply newly discovered phenomena whose antecedents are unknown or, even worse, irrelevant. Rather, we can gradually help students understand the origins of psychological knowledge and their bearing on current problems and issues. We can help students understand how the psychology of today is related to the problems and issues that confronted psychologists of past generations. And in so doing we can help students understand that the attainment of psychological knowledge is an intellectual journey -- a continuous search from one generation to another (Costin, 1982).

I now come to what may be the greatest challenge to courage in the classroom -- dealing with controversial and sensitive ideas. I am not referring to simply exposing students to controversy. A fair number of psychology textbooks include discussions of controversial and socially sensitive topics, sometimes labeling them as such in special, attention-getting displays. That is all to the good. However, one could assign such material for required reading, include it on examinations, but devote little if any classroom attention to it. Thus one could be satisfied that controversy had not been neglected, while at the same time avoid the conflict and disturbing challenges that classroom discussion are likely to arouse. This solution is a comfortable one, but certainly not very bold. More courageous is the deliberate planning of one's courses so that controversial ideas and sensitive issues are given a fair share of classroom time.

There are, of course, different levels of controversial problems in psychology. Safest, and least subject to passionate convictions, are such topics as "the linguistic relativity hypothesis," or "theories of color vision." These invite controversial views and interpretations and their careful study can promote critical thinking. Indeed, some teachers can make such topics intellectually exciting. However, they do not as a rule hold any particular threat for either teacher or student -- at least, threat which involves one's emotional self. Thus, they are not likely to create any serious discomfort in the classroom. In contrast, consider such topics as homosexuality;

racial and ethnic differences in intelligence; sex difference in abilities; the use of electroshock and drugs in treatment of mental disorders; "insanity" as a legal defense; family conflicts; and rape, sexual abuse and incest. These are topics not only included in advanced undergraduate courses, but also in the introductory course as well. They are but a few of the topics in psychology which if studied adequately are likely to involve problems and issues that challenge teachers and students and lead to conflict and defense.

I assume that the classroom treatment of controversial subjects is an integral part of higher education. However, one cannot deal with them without risking the possibility that some students' moral, ethical, religious or political beliefs and attitudes will be challenged -- and, indeed, in some instances, directly contradicted. The question, then, is not whether the teacher should present these issues in the classroom, but how they can best be handled productively. The French essayist Joubert (1842) once remarked that "the aim of argument, or discussion, should not be victory but progress," With that in mind, let me suggest a few ways in which controversial and sensitive topics, and the issues that surround them, can be dealt with in the classroom.

One can, of course, carefully present the pros and cons of an issue, elicit little reaction from the students, and still feel satisfied that one has handled the controversy productively. Although doing that is preferable to completely ignoring the topic, and may give students something to think about, it is still imperative in this

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age to encourage students to speak up, and even to express views that may be unpopular with other students. Here the teacher must be careful to help students evaluate the responses, help them consider wherever possible the evidence that supports or fails to support those views. At the same time, however, this should be done in a way that students do not feel their contributions are of little value, especially if evidence points in an opposite direction. Nevertheless, students should learn that freedom to express one's views and conclusions is not sufficient. They should also be buttressed by evidence. Thus, students can learn to respect valid data, whether that information confirms or denies their original position.

Another problem often encountered in discussing controversial topics is the drawing of conclusions. Although they need not be hard and fast, and indeed in many cases cannot be, I believe that the teacher should help students come to some kind of resolution, tentative as it may be. Here, incidentally, one may often be faced with pressure from some students, especially in today's climate of conformity, to offer only highly specific and definite conclusions which they can, in turn, repeat on an examination or paper. It would be well, then, for the teacher to clarify for students how this expectation can be an obstacle to learning, and to point out that the evaluation procedures in the course do not demand an unswerving belief in a particular position. Rather they require the ability to understand issues and to know how to reach an answer with objectivity and scientific respectability.

Still another demand on teachers is the necessity for a reasonable degree of insight into their own attitudes, values, and beliefs surrounding the issue at hand. Teachers should be sufficiently aware of any strong feelings, conflicts, or other aspects of their self that could interfere unduly with their classroom performance. For example, this self-awareness could help prevent their pushing particular viewpoint or conclusion too forcefully because of their highly personal meaning to them.

As you can see, the kind of courage in the classroom that I have been talking about is not simply a matter of theoretical conviction. It must also be expressed in direct action. In her essay, Let Us Have Faith, Helen Keller (1940) wrote: "There is plenty of courage among us for the abstract, but not for the concrete." I hope that as teachers of psychology we can meet that challenge and move evermore from the abstract to the concrete.

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